

Do You Want to Be a Cowboy/girl?

Grade Level: 4–8

Time: 1-2 days

Activity Description: Students will conduct guided research of primary and secondary sources to decide if they would like to have been working cowboys or cowgirls on the open range.

Materials

- Guided Research Station Sources 1-6 (below)
- Reading, “Ranching” (below)
- Pens or pencils and paper (and/or computers for word processing)

Pre-lesson Preparation

- Review the lesson plan and set up research stations.

Procedure

Step 1: Write Your Way In

1. Ask students to take out a pencil and their writing journals, or a sheet of paper, and date it.
2. Let them know that they will be thinking hard and writing for three minutes nonstop, as soon as you say, “Go!” You will be using a timer and they must keep on going, not lifting their pencils until the three minutes are up. If they are stuck for what to write next, encourage them to write, “I am thinking!” until they think of more to say. Remind them they can use their imaginations! Create a sense of urgency!

For this exercise, they should not be concerned with their spelling, etc. They should just think and pour out their thoughts on paper.

3. Provide the following prompt: Do you think you would have liked to be a cowboy or cowgirl on the open range? Why or why not?
4. When the timer goes off at the end of three minutes, tell students to draw a line where they stopped. Let them know that these are the guiding questions for the unit. Collect their

quick-writes and save them to pass back at the end of the unit.

Step 2: Guided Research

1. Tell students that they are going to learn more about life on the ranching frontier by doing research.
2. Remind them of their guiding questions: Do you think you would have liked to be a cowboy or cowgirl on the open range? Why or why not?
3. Let them know that they will have a chance to look at both primary and secondary sources.

- Define primary sources. Primary sources are the raw materials of history. They are directly related to a topic **by time or participation**. Help students list types of primary sources (letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time, oral histories or reminiscences, photographs, artifacts, advertisements).
- Define secondary sources. Secondary sources are written after an event or time period. They are based on primary sources or on other secondary sources. Help students list types of secondary sources (their textbook, a newspaper or magazine article written after the fact, a website with information about a topic).

4. Divide the class into six groups. Assign each group a starting station. Have all groups circulate through all the stations. Encourage the groups to discuss the sources at each station, but make sure everyone records his or her own answers in their notebook.
5. Revisit the guiding questions in a class discussion: “Would you have liked to have been a cowboy or cowgirl? Why or why not?” As students share their opinions require them to

bring in evidence from the sources they just looked at. (You might want to draw Pro/Con chart on the board and record data from the students' research.)

6. Tell them it is now time to pull together their research and to create a secondary source. Have them write paragraph. It should start: "I think I would have (or not have) enjoyed being a cowboy (or cowgirl)." Tell them their paragraph MUST contain three pieces of evidence from their research to support their thesis statement. (Optional: Expand the assignment by having students bring in additional evidence from chapter 8 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*, available online at mhs.mt.gov/education/storiesoftheland/Part2/Chapter8)
7. Pass out the quick writes students created at the beginning of the unit. Have students read them to themselves. Talk about what they learned. Did the research change anyone's opinion? Did it reinforce anyone's opinion?

Station 1: Hardships

The text below is from Teddy Blue Abbott,
We Pointed Them North

Lots of cowpunchers were killed by lightning, which is known fact. I was knocked off my horse by it twice. ... When I came to, I was lying under old Pete and the rain was pouring down on my face. ...

But when you add it all up, I believe the worst hardship we had on the trail was the loss of sleep. ... Our day wouldn't end until about nine o'clock, when we grazed the herd onto the bed ground. And after that, every man in the outfit except the boss and horse wrangler and cook would have to stand two hours night guard. ... So I would get maybe five hours of sleep when the weather was nice, and everything smooth and pretty with cowboys singing under the stars. If it wasn't so nice, you'd be lucky to sleep an hour. But the wagon rolled on in the morning. ...

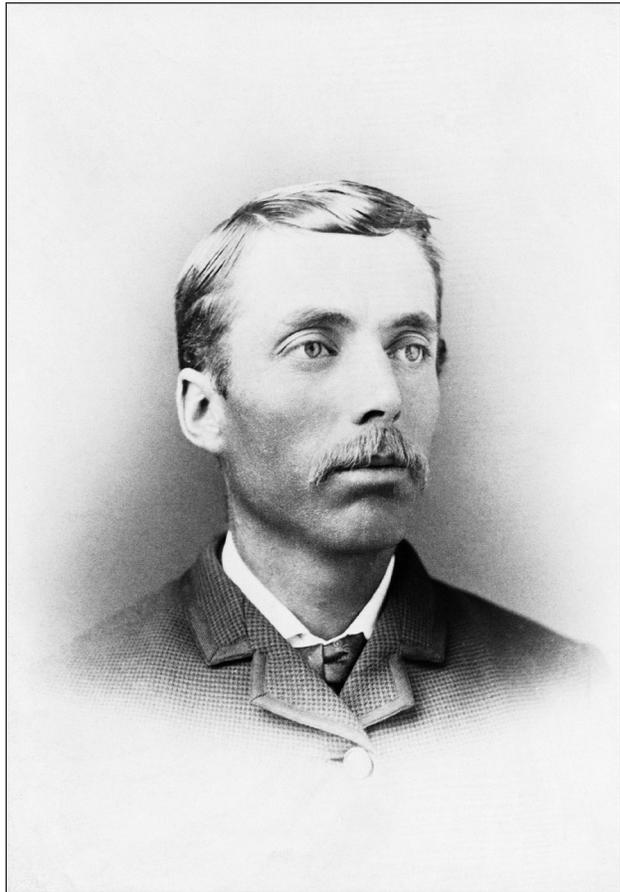
Questions:

According to Teddy Blue Abbott, what was the hardest part of being a cowboy?

How many hours do you usually sleep at night?

How many hours did cowboys sleep at night?

What's one important piece of information you gathered from this source?



Teddy Blue Abbott, circa 1885



During a cattle drive, cowboys took turns circling the herd to keep the cattle together at night. Another cowboy, called a “night hawk,” stayed up all night to guard the trail horses. He was the only cowboy on the cattle drive who got to sleep in. (Photograph by L. A. Huffman, 981-568)

Station 2: Life on the Range

Questions:

Compare modern camping equipment to this picture of the night hawk. Which do you think is more comfortable?

What was the nighthawk’s job on the drive?

What do you think the night hawk did when it rained?

What’s one important piece of information you gathered from this source?

Station 3: Jackson Sundown, Nez Perce Rodeo Star

After the buffalo were gone, many American Indians became cowboys or ranchers. They raised cattle and horses. Some became involved in rodeo.

One famous American Indian rodeo cowboy was Jackson Sundown, also known as Waaya-Tonah-Toesits-Kahn. He was born in Montana in 1863. He was a member of the Wallowa Band of Nez Perce Indians. The Nez Perce were known for their horsemanship, and Sundown grew up riding horses.

When Sundown was fourteen he fled to Canada with other members of his band. The United States Army was trying to make them leave their homeland and move to a reservation. Later Jackson Sundown moved back to Montana. He made his living raising and selling horses. He started entering rodeos. He was so good that other riders refused to compete against him. They knew they couldn't win. In 1916, he was named the Bronco Bucking Champion of the World at the Pendleton Stampede. He was fifty-three years old, the oldest person to ever win a rodeo world championship title.

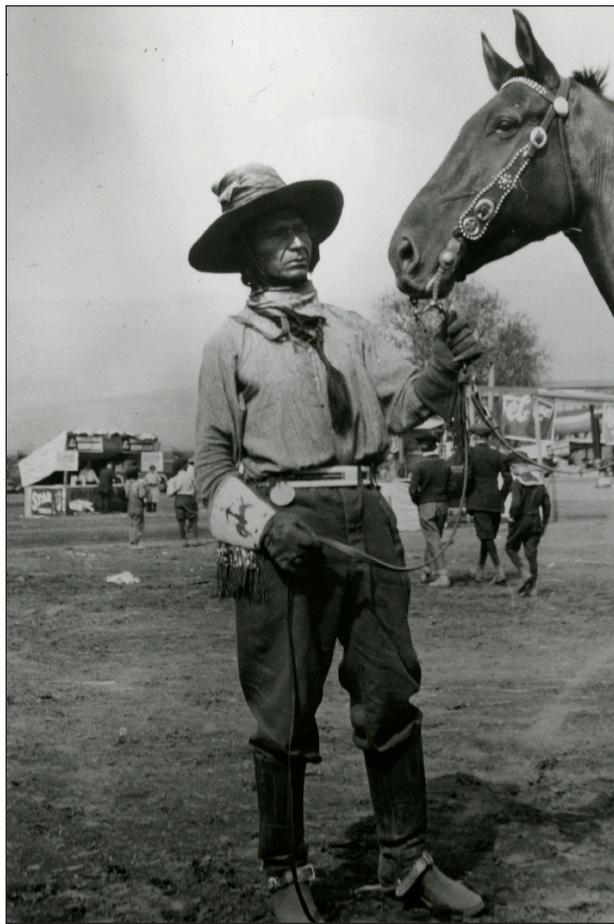
Questions

Why is Jackson Sundown famous?

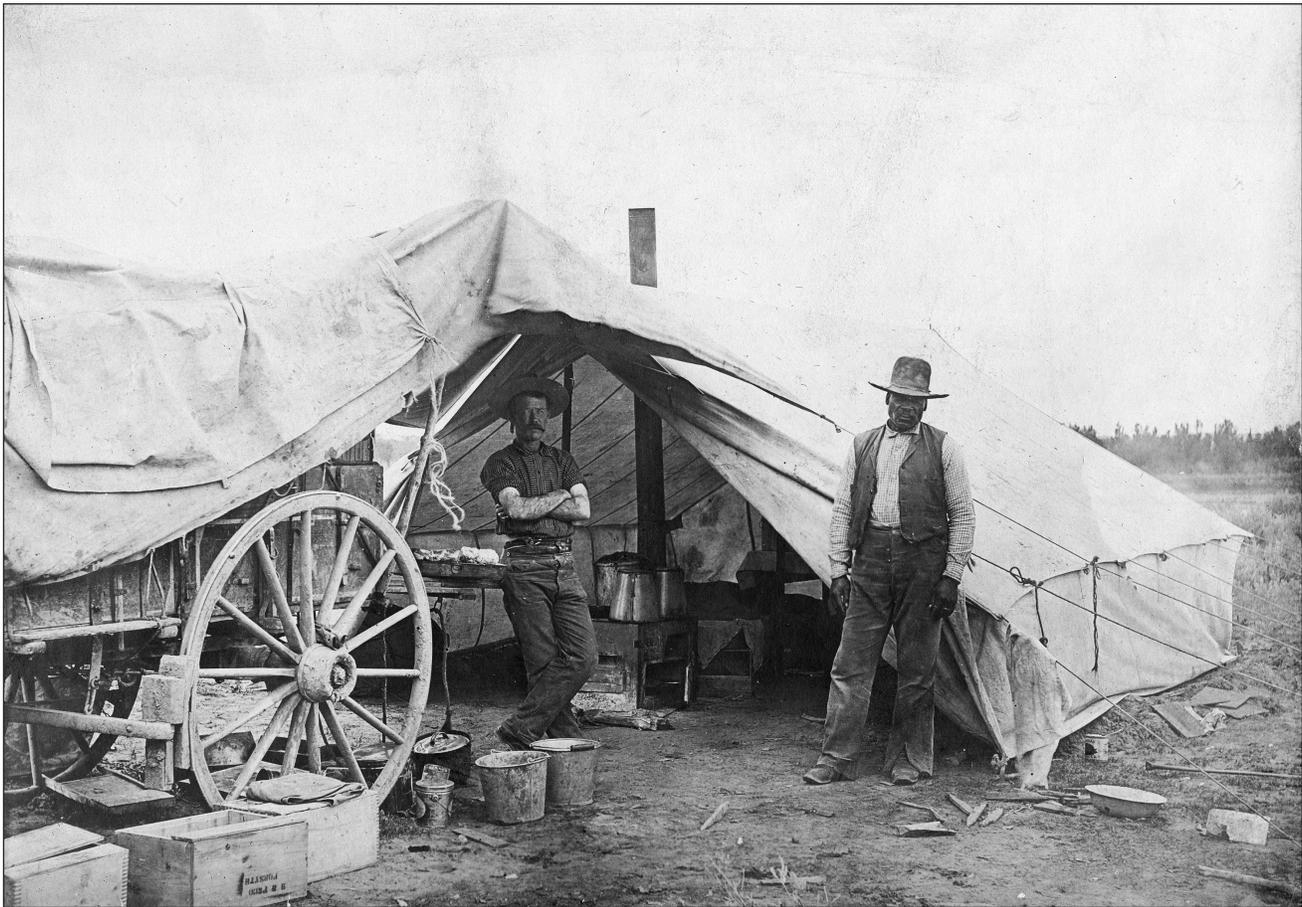
What tribe is he from?

Look at the picture. What hints can you find that Jackson Sundown was Nez Perce? What hints can you find that he was a cowboy?

What's one important piece of information you gathered from this source?



Nez Perce Rodeo Champion Jackson Sundown, Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture/Eastern Washington State Historical Society, L94-14.20



*D. J. O'Malley and George Jackson, near Forsyth, Montana, at the entrance of the cook tent, about 1900.
PAC 85-33 F5lg.jpg*

Station 4: Who Worked as a Cowboy?

Men came to Montana to work as cowboys from all over the United States and even the world. Some came up from Texas, driving herds of cattle. About one out of every three cowboys was either African American, Mexican, or Native American.

No matter where they were from, cowboys had certain things in common. Most of them were young and all of them were tough. According to one historian, "They were paid so badly, and worked so hard, that two-thirds of them made only one trail drive before finding something better to do."

Other cowboys had good memories of their time on the range. Teddy Blue Abbott said, "Old-timers have told all about stampedes and swimming rivers and what a terrible time we had, but they never put in any of the fun, and fun was at least half of it."

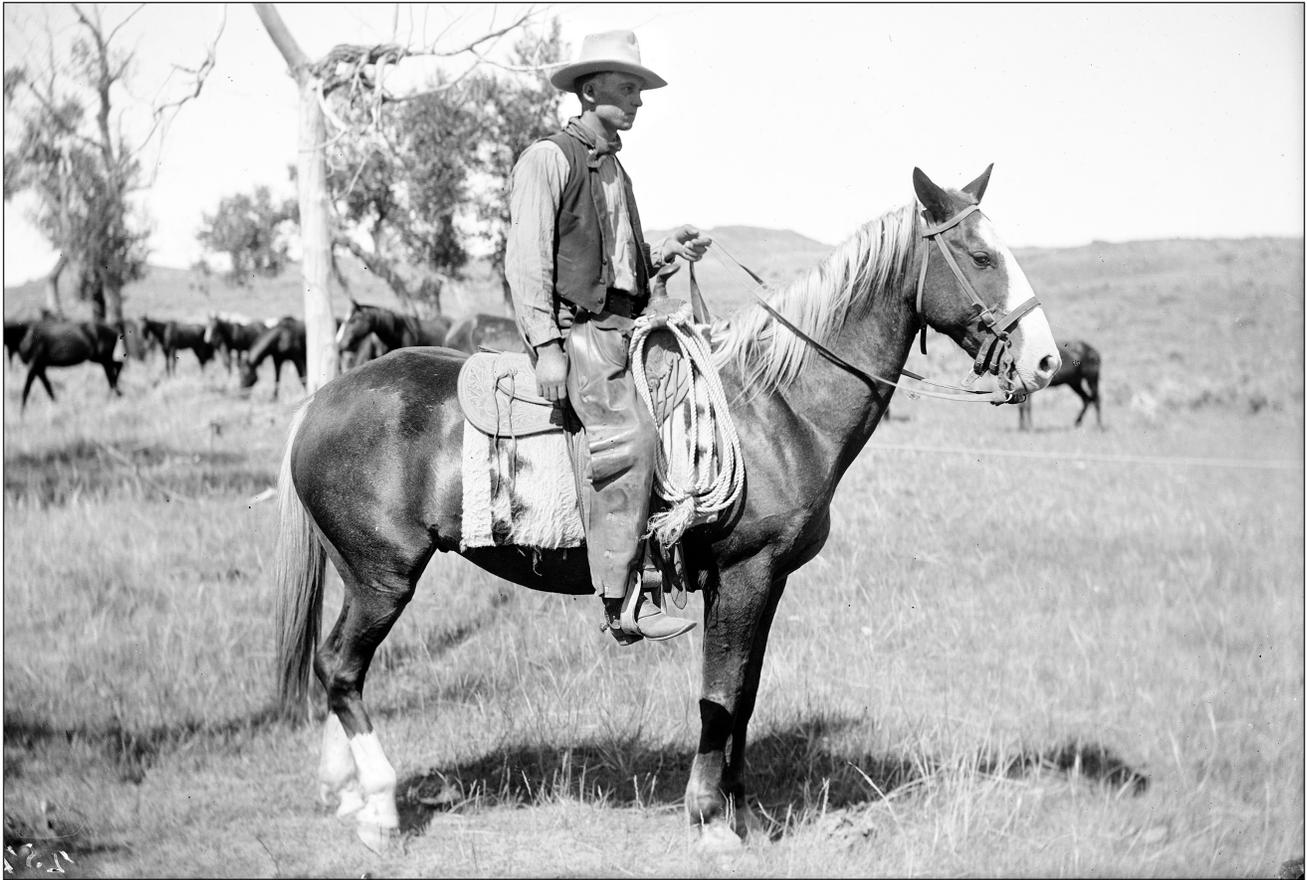
Questions

True or false: All cowboys were white.

List two things cowboys had in common.

Did Teddy Blue Abbott like being a cowboy? What is your evidence?

What's one important piece of information you gathered from this source?



Cowboy Dunn, the Hat X horse wrangler (photograph by L. A. Huffman, 981-660)

Station 5: Daily Life

The text below is from Teddy Blue Abbott, *We Pointed Them North*

I'd never seen such wonderful grub as they had at the DHS. They had canned tomatoes all the time, canned peaches even, while dried apples and prunes were the best you ever got in most cow outfits, and you were lucky to get those.

Another thing about cowpunchers, they didn't have any radio or other forms of entertainment, and they got a big kick out of little things. That was why I got such a reputation among them for singing and storytelling and all that foolishness. It might be a rainy night and they would all be humped up around the camp fire, feeling gloomy, and I'd come in ...and in a minute I'd have them all laughing. Veto Cross ...

used to say I was worth forty dollars a month just to stick around camp. ...

Questions

What do you see in the photograph that tells you it is a picture of a cowboy?

What was special about the food at the DHS ranch?

Would you be excited to eat that food?

What does it suggest about the food cowboys usually ate?

What did the cowboys do for fun?

What do you do for fun?

What's one important piece of information you gathered from this source?



Station 6: Women Ranchers

Big cattle company did not hire women, but women worked with horses and cattle on their own ranches. They did the same work that cowboys did, including breaking horses and rounding up, roping, and branding cattle.

May, Myrtle and Mabel Buckley ran their family ranch near Terry, Montana. They were known as “serious cow people,” and local cowboys admired their skills. Photographer Evelyn Cameron took this picture of one of the Buckley sisters roping a horse in the early 1900s.

Questions

What is going on in this picture?

What type of work did women ranchers do?

What’s one important piece of information you gathered from this source?